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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6595
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0547
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4079
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7637
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5196
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3321
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0982
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000941

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; INR/EAP; S/ES-O/CMS
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/28/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA PROTESTS SUBSIDE BUT BECOME MORE VIOLENT

REF: A. RANGOON 926 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. DAO RANGON 271356Z SEP 07

[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 157

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Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for Reasons 1.4
(b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Clashes between security forces and small groups of demonstrators continued in downtown Rangoon on September 28. Today's demonstrations were significantly smaller and less organized than in the past. For the first time since August 17, we did not observe any monks participating in the protests. Embassy officers observed a strong security presence throughout Rangoon, and military trucks transporting armed troops were on the scene to break up protests. Witnesses reported soldiers beating, shooting at, and detaining protestors and observers as soon as groups began to gather. We cannot confirm any protest-related deaths. UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari is scheduled to arrive in Rangoon on September 29. End Summary.

Security Around Town

[1](#)2. (SBU) Security forces maintained barbed wire roadblocks throughout Rangoon, particularly around Aung San Suu Kyi's home and Sule Pagoda. We observed an increase in security camped out in downtown Rangoon - approximately 15 military trucks and 7 fires trucks were stationed outside of City Hall. Security around Shwe Dagon Pagoda appeared to have eased slightly - there were no trucks and small scale security forces at the pagoda, and several previously blocked roads around the pagoda have opened.

[1](#)3. (C) Throughout the day, Embassy officers witnessed many military trucks carrying troops armed with automatic rifles patrolling the city. According to Poloff, police erected many barbed wire blockades and placed them in side streets downtown and near monasteries.

Demonstrations and Crackdowns

¶4. (C) Despite an extremely heavy security presence, protestors again demonstrated in downtown Rangoon. The protests were significantly smaller than previous days, estimated at several hundred people, and consisted of only civilians. These protests were also significantly more violent. At 1300 local time, sources reported that at least three protestors were shot on Pansodan Road (downtown Rangoon, not far from Sule Pagoda). At 1430, Poloff witnessed approximately 100 soldiers advancing in formation down Pansodan Road toward a group of protestors and onlookers, and 5-6 army trucks transporting additional soldiers to the area. One expatriate witnessed soldiers beating protestors with sticks, using gas to disperse crowds, and firing shots. He also saw approximately 30 severely injured people lying in the street; it was unclear whether they were dead. At 1530, soldiers dispersed another group near Pansodan Bridge. Poloff witnessed soldiers shooting from the bridge, but could not see if anyone was injured.

¶5. (C) Sources told us that several student activists, who were shouting political slogans and marching downtown, scattered when security forces arrived. Instead of chasing down the activists, soldiers beat and detained onlookers. According to Embassy contacts, onlookers and protestors throughout the day were chased by police away from the main demonstration down side streets. Poloff witnessed one man being detained by four police officers. Another eyewitness confirmed at least 30 more people were detained. The security forces continued to warn protestors and onlookers over loudspeakers that they should go home or face serious consequences.

¶6. (C) We continue to receive reports of protests elsewhere in the country, including those involving monks in Mandalay.

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Continuing telephone difficulties have hindered our ability to corroborate these reports.

GOB Tries to Shut Down Internet

¶7. (C) Contacts at local internet providers Bagan Net and Myanmar Post and Telecommunications confirmed that the GOB ordered the cutting off of Internet because it wanted to control news of the demonstrations. The GOB publicly claimed that the problems with the internet were due to complications with an underwater cable. Some Bagan Net users informed Econoff that they still have Internet access, but it takes more than 20 minutes to download a page; MPT service is down. A foreign journalist staying at a downtown hotel said the internet in the business center was not working this afternoon. Few, if any, of the local blogs have been updated since yesterday.

UN Agencies Adopt New Security Posture

¶8. (C) UNDP informed us that all UN agencies in Burma altered their security posture on September 28 to restrict movements of UN personnel, many of whom have offices in Traders Hotel. (Note: Traders is located approximately a quarter mile from Sule Pagoda; people have had difficulty leaving Traders this week due to demonstrations and heavy security immediately in front of the hotel.) According to the UNDP office, UN staff members in Burma were requested either to stay in their offices until after 5pm or leave their offices before 12 noon, and to make no unnecessary movements between 12 noon and 5pm.

Burma Agrees to Gambari Visit

¶9. (SBU) UNDP informed us that the Burmese Government agreed to a visit by Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari, starting on September 29. Gambari will call on authorities to engage in a constructive dialogue and to commit to a path of peaceful and inclusive national reconciliation.

Confirmation of Japanese Citizen Death

¶10. (C) The GOB in the New Light of Myanmar confirmed the death of a Japanese reporter Mr. Nagai Kengi on September 27. The New Light claims he was killed while "gathering news amidst the protests although he only had a tourist visa." One of our Embassy Officers taped footage, showing that the reporter was shot by Burmese forces, although the GOB previously declared he was killed by protestors throwing rocks. We passed the video to the Japanese Embassy on September 28.

Comment

¶11. (C) The military has ratcheted up their reaction to violently prevent further large demonstrations downtown. However, reports of scattered demonstrations elsewhere in the city (see Ref B) indicate that popular anger still festers. There is no indication that the military heeded the international outrage of their actions. To the contrary, they probably feel satisfied that their use of force has been effective. They may be succeeding at reinforcing the fear they have tried to instill over the past 19 years, but they have failed to address the underlying popular grievances.

VILLAROSA